MARVEL COMICS
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MILLIGAN
DEODATO, JR.
KOBLISH
ELEKTRA
...KILLS HER BEST FRIEND?!

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STAN LEE PRESENTS:

THE CIRCLE UNBROKEN!

MY CASE IS OPEN TO INTERPRETATION.

SHRINGG

HOW SO?

YOU WERE DEAD--

--AND YOU CAME BACK!

LARRY HAMA
WRITER

MIKE DEODATO JR.
ARTIST

SCOTT KOBLISH
INKS

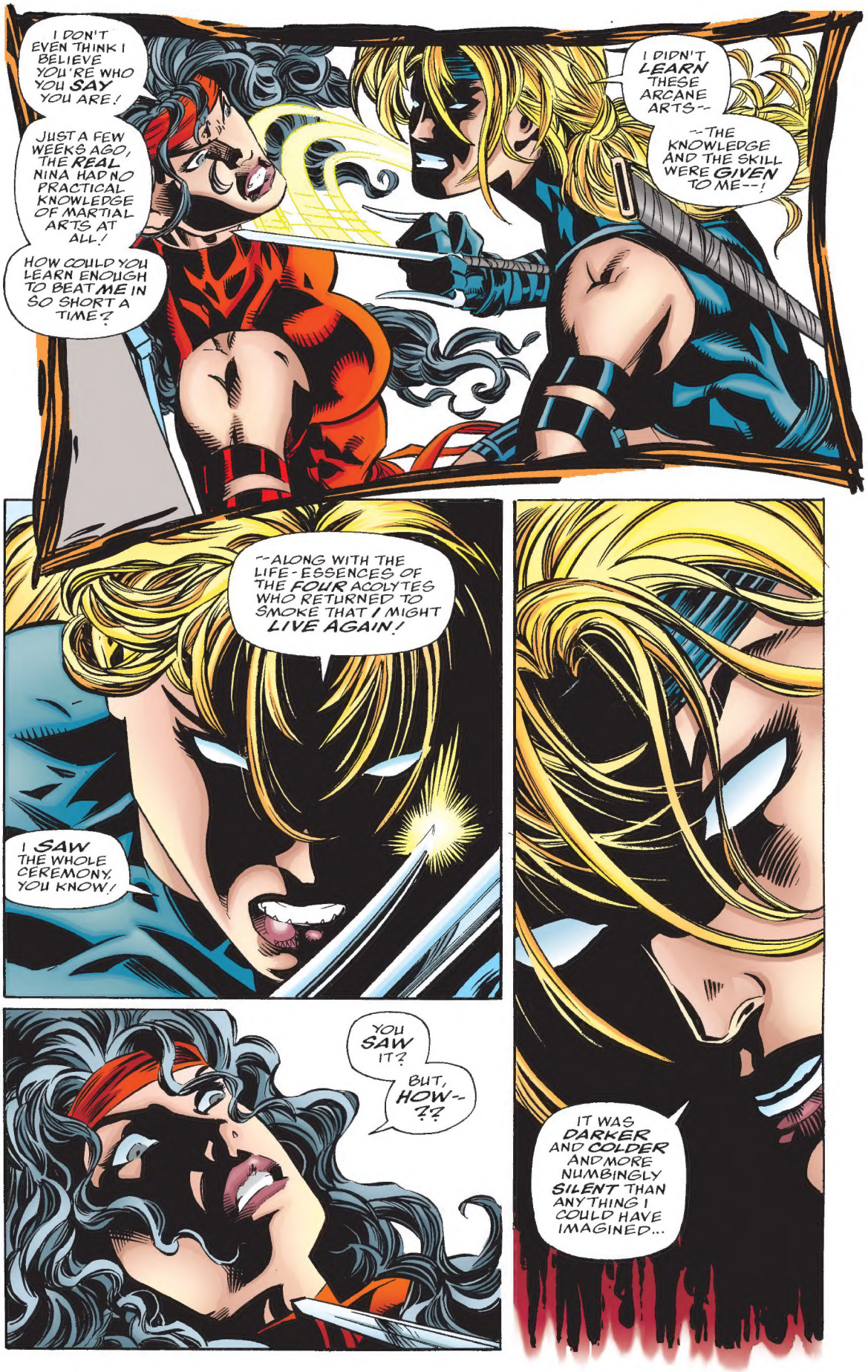
CHRISTIE SCHEELE
COLORS

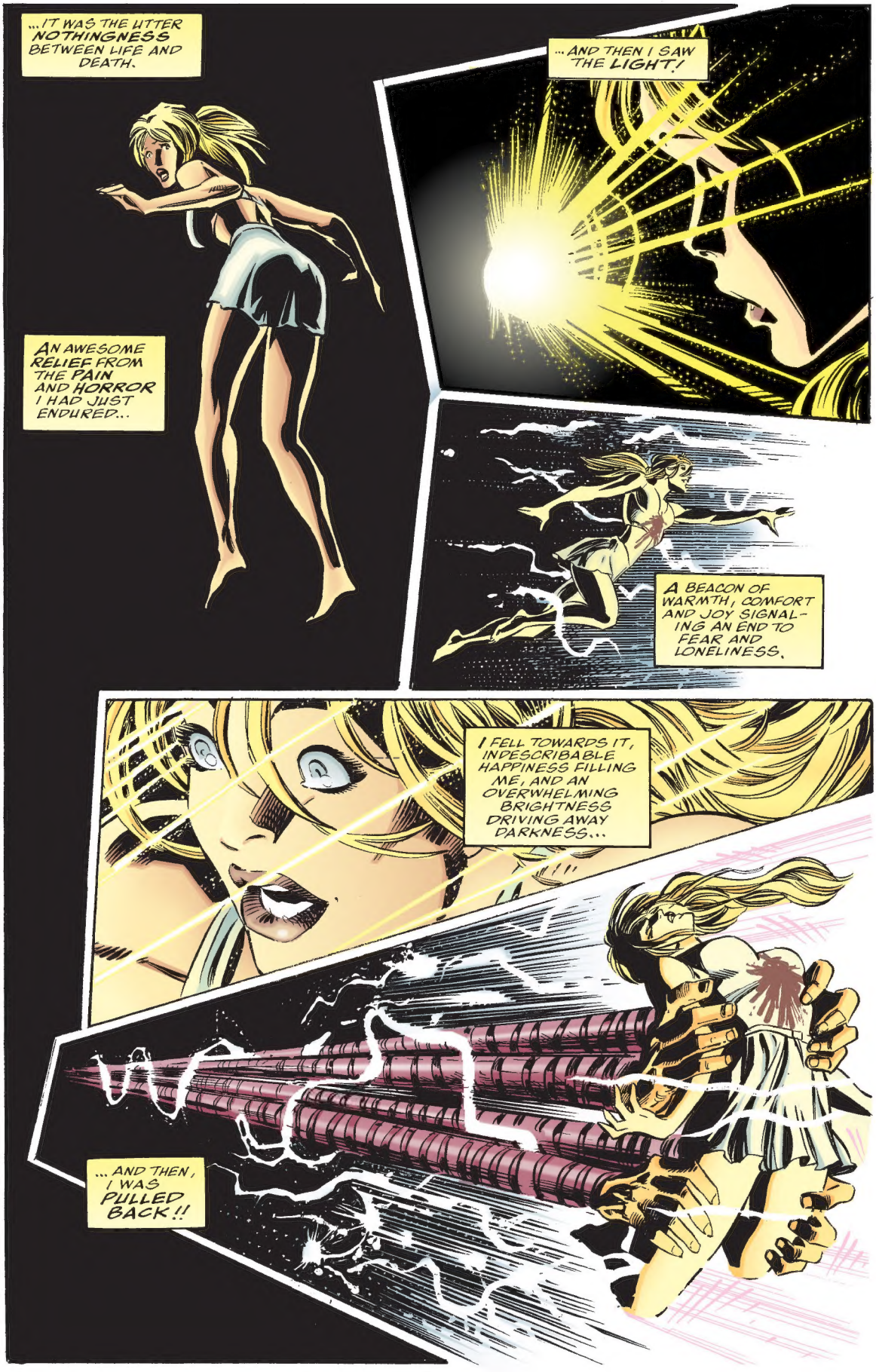
JACK MORELLI
LETTERS

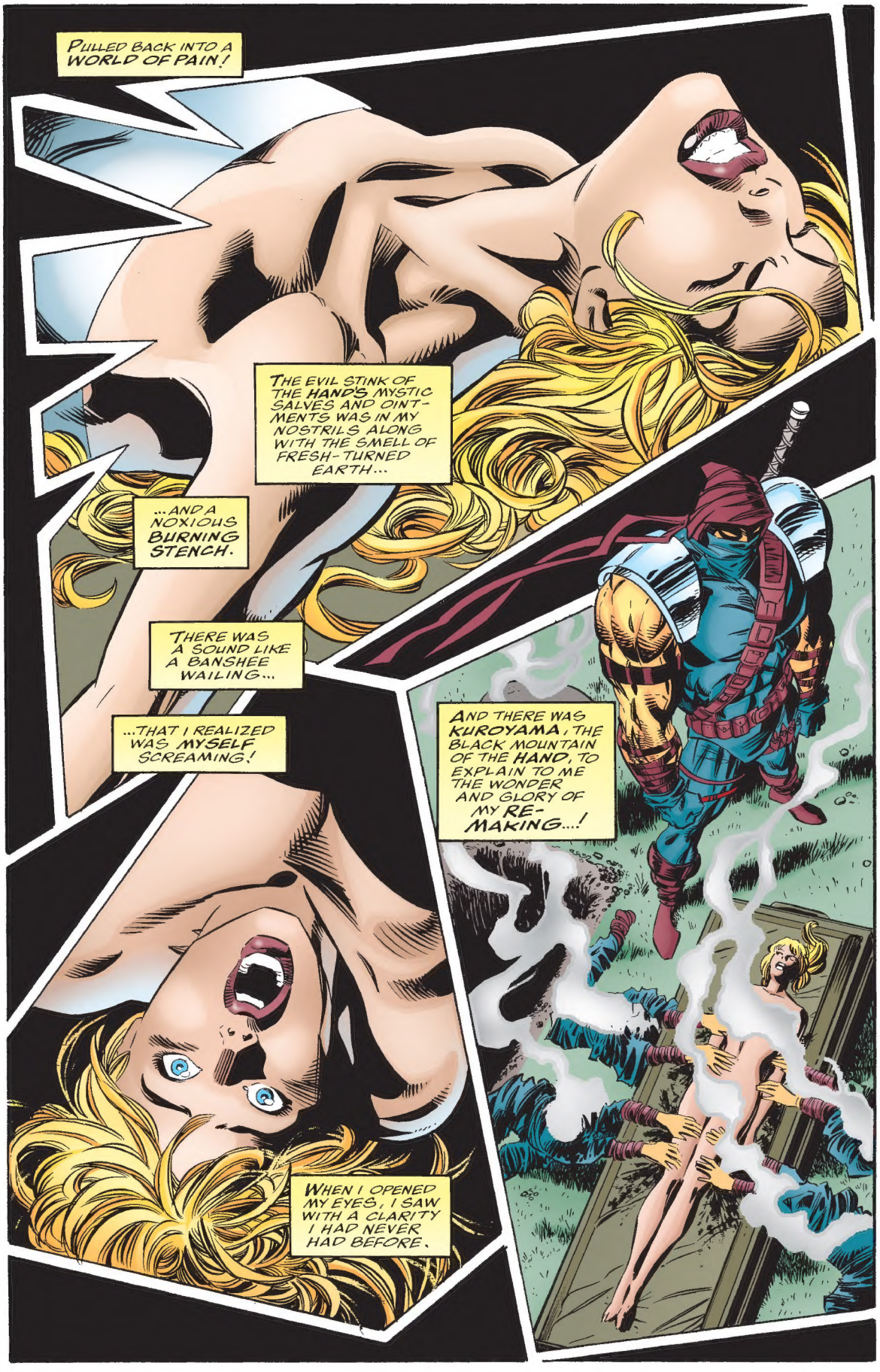
BOBBIE CHASE
EDITOR

BOB HARRAS
CHIEF

I COULD HAVE BEEN IN A CATATONIC STATE SO DEEP THAT IT WAS INDISTINGUISHABLE FROM DEATH!
KLANG
THE HAND MIGHT HAVE SIMPLY REVIVED ME!
TOO CONVOLUTED!
CHANGG
THE HAND REVELS IN COMPLI-CATED CONSPIRACIES!
KA-CHUNG
THEY DON'T NEED TO BE SO DISINGENUOUS--
--THEY CAN DO WHAT THEY CLAIM!
KRANG
I KNOW IT FOR A FACT!
THRAK
EVERYTHING THE HAND BELIEVES IN IS A LIE, NINA!

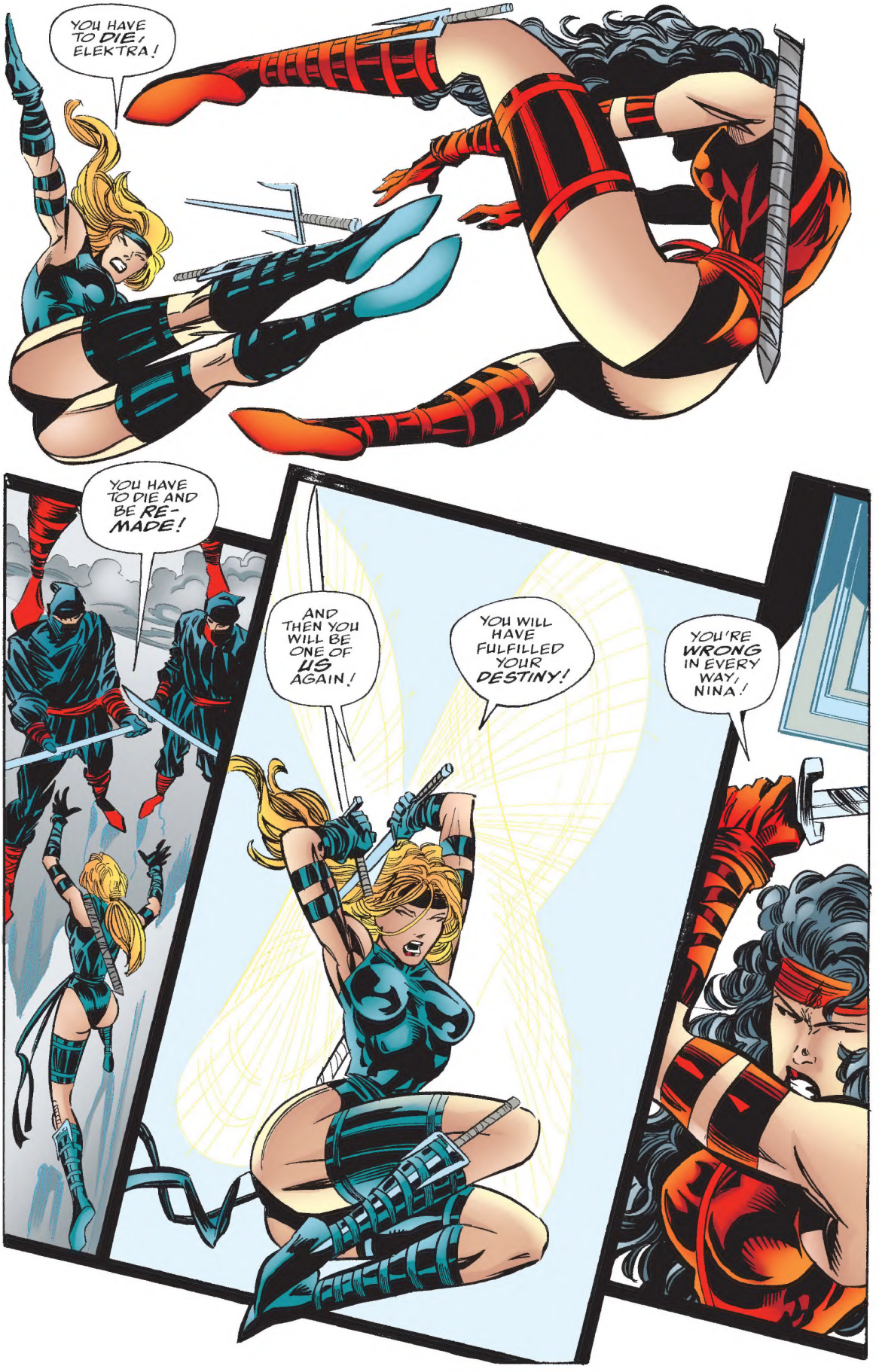

I DON'T EVEN THINK I BELIEVE YOU'RE WHO YOU SAY YOU ARE!
JUST A FEW WEEKS AGO, THE REAL NINA HAD NO PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE OF MARTIAL ARTS AT ALL!
HOW COULD YOU LEARN ENOUGH TO BEAT ME IN SO SHORT A TIME?
I DIDN'T LEARN THESE ARCANE ARTS--
--THE KNOWLEDGE AND THE SKILL WERE GIVEN TO ME--!
--ALONG WITH THE LIFE-ESSENCES OF THE FOUR ACOLYTES WHO RETURNED TO SMOKE THAT I MIGHT LIVE AGAIN!
I SAW THE WHOLE CEREMONY. YOU KNOW!
YOU SAW IT?
BUT, HOW--??
IT WAS DARKER AND COLDER AND MORE NUMBINGLY SILENT THAN ANYTHING I COULD HAVE IMAGINED...


...IT WAS THE UTTER NOTHINGNESS BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH.
AN AWESOME RELIEF FROM THE PAIN AND HORROR I HAD JUST ENDURED...
...AND THEN I SAW THE LIGHT!
A BEACON OF WARMTH, COMFORT AND JOY SIGNALING AN END TO FEAR AND LONELINESS.
I FELL TOWARDS IT, INDESCRIBABLE HAPPINESS FILLING ME, AND AN OVERWHELMING BRIGHTNESS DRIVING AWAY DARKNESS...
!!
...AND THEN, I WAS PULLED BACK!!

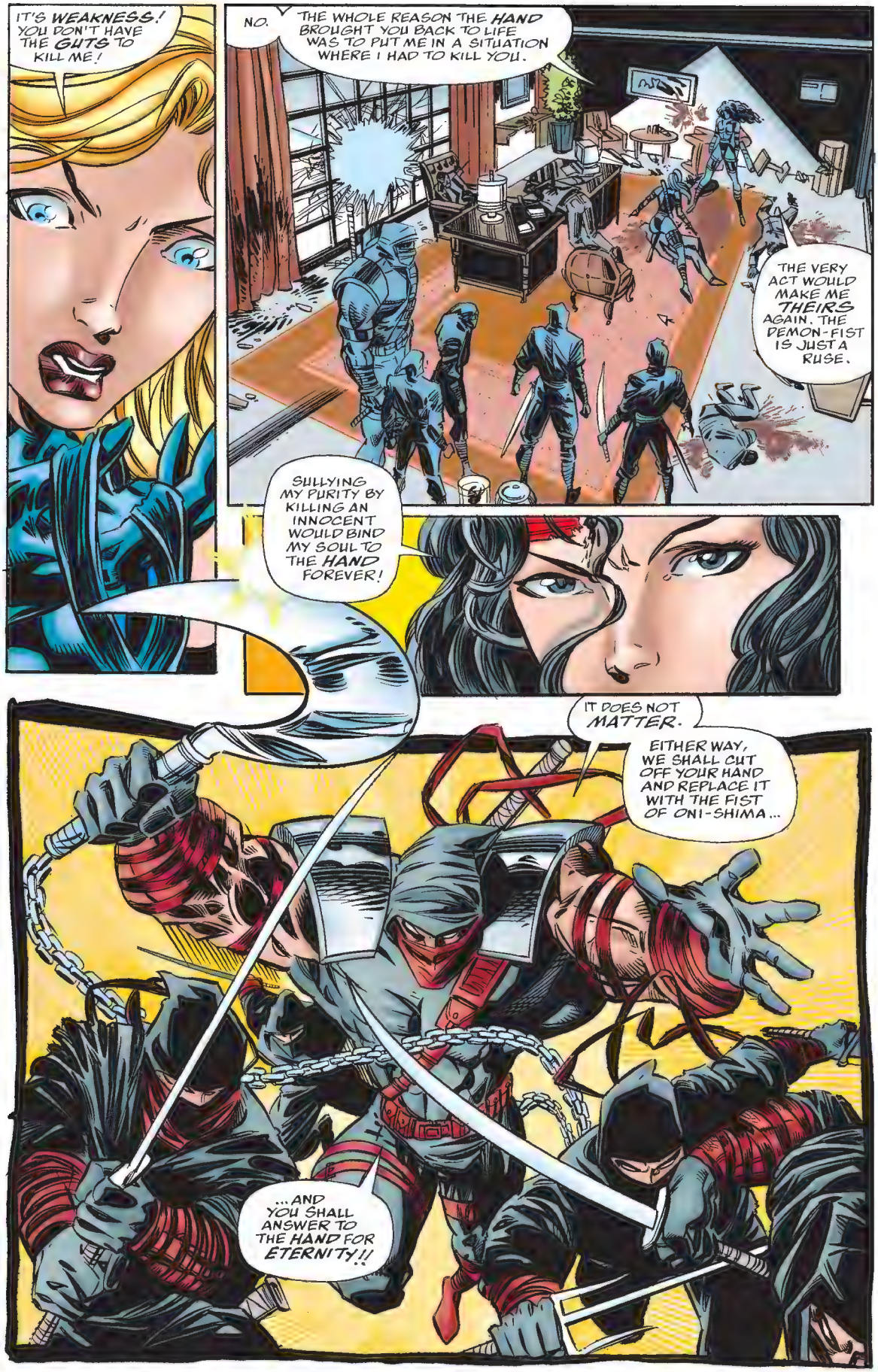

PULLED BACK INTO A WORLD OF PAIN!
THE EVIL STINK OF THE HAND'S MYSTIC SALVES AND OINTMENTS WAS IN MY NOSTRILS ALONG WITH THE SMELL OF FRESH-TURNED EARTH...
...AND A NOXIOUS BURNING STENCH.
THERE WAS A SOUND LIKE A BANSHEE WAILING...
...THAT I REALIZED WAS MYSELF SCREAMING!
WHEN I OPENED MY EYES, I SAW WITH A CLARITY I HAD NEVER HAD BEFORE.
AND THERE WAS KUROYAMA, THE BLACK MOUNTAIN OF THE HAND, TO EXPLAIN TO ME THE WONDER AND GLORY OF MY RE-MAKING...!

...FOR NOW, I AM MORE THAN I WAS BEFORE!
NOW, I HAVE POWER, AND A PURPOSE!
AND ALL I NEED TO DO TO CLAIM MY RIGHTFUL PLACE IN THE HAND... IS TO KILL YOU!!
THAT DOESN'T SCAN, NINA.
WHY WOULD THE HAND REVIVE YOU JUST TO ASSASSINATE ME?
THE HAND WOULD RATHER HAVE ME BACK AS ONE OF THEIR OWN THAN HAVE ME DEAD AGAIN!

OH, BUT BEING DEAD AGAIN IS JUST THE FIRST STEP IN THE PROCESS!
KUROYAMA!
BUT THIS TIME, WHEN WE BRING YOU BACK, WE WILL RE-PLACE YOUR HAND WITH THE DEMON-FIST OF ONI-SHIMA...!
...BY THIS TOKEN OF CONSUMMATE EVIL, SHALL THE HAND HAVE COMPLETE DOMINION OVER YOU, ELEKTRA!


YOU HAVE TO DIE, ELEKTRA!
YOU HAVE TO DIE AND BE RE-MADE!
AND THEN YOU WILL BE ONE OF US AGAIN!
YOU WILL HAVE FULFILLED YOUR DESTINY!
YOU'RE WRONG IN EVERY WAY, NINA!

AND YOU'RE DOUBLY WRONG IF YOU THINK THAT YOU CAN BEAT ME WITH SECOND-HAND TECHNIQUES FROM DEAD MEN!
YOU'RE BLOWING HOT AIR, ELEKTRA!
YOU DIDN'T EVEN COME CLOSE--
Whu--? MY HEAD-BAND!
YOU SLICED IT CLEAN THROUGH, AND DIDN'T LEAVE A SCRATCH ON ME!
IT WOULD'VE BEEN EASIER TO KILL ME THAN TO MAKE SUCH A DIFFICULT, CONTROLLED CUT!


IT'S WEAKNESS! YOU DON'T HAVE THE GUTS TO KILL ME!
NO.
THE WHOLE REASON THE HAND BROUGHT YOU BACK TO LIFE WAS TO PUT ME IN A SITUATION WHERE I HAD TO KILL YOU.
THE VERY ACT WOULD MAKE ME THEIRS AGAIN. THE DEMON-FIST IS JUST A RUSE.
SULLYING MY PURITY BY KILLING AN INNOCENT WOULD BIND MY SOUL TO THE HAND FOREVER!
IT DOES NOT MATTER.
EITHER WAY, WE SHALL CUT OFF YOUR HAND AND REPLACE IT WITH THE FIST OF ONI-SHIMA...
...AND YOU SHALL ANSWER TO THE HAND FOR ETERNITY!!

I
THINK
NOT!
YOU SHOULD KNOW THERE IS A PRICE FOR HUBRIS, ELEKTRA!
THOSE FOUR WERE BUT ACOLYTES: MERE JOURNEYMEN ASSASSINS!
HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN HOW EASILY I, A MASTER OF THE HAND, DEFEATED YOU IN OUR LAST ENCOUNTER!?

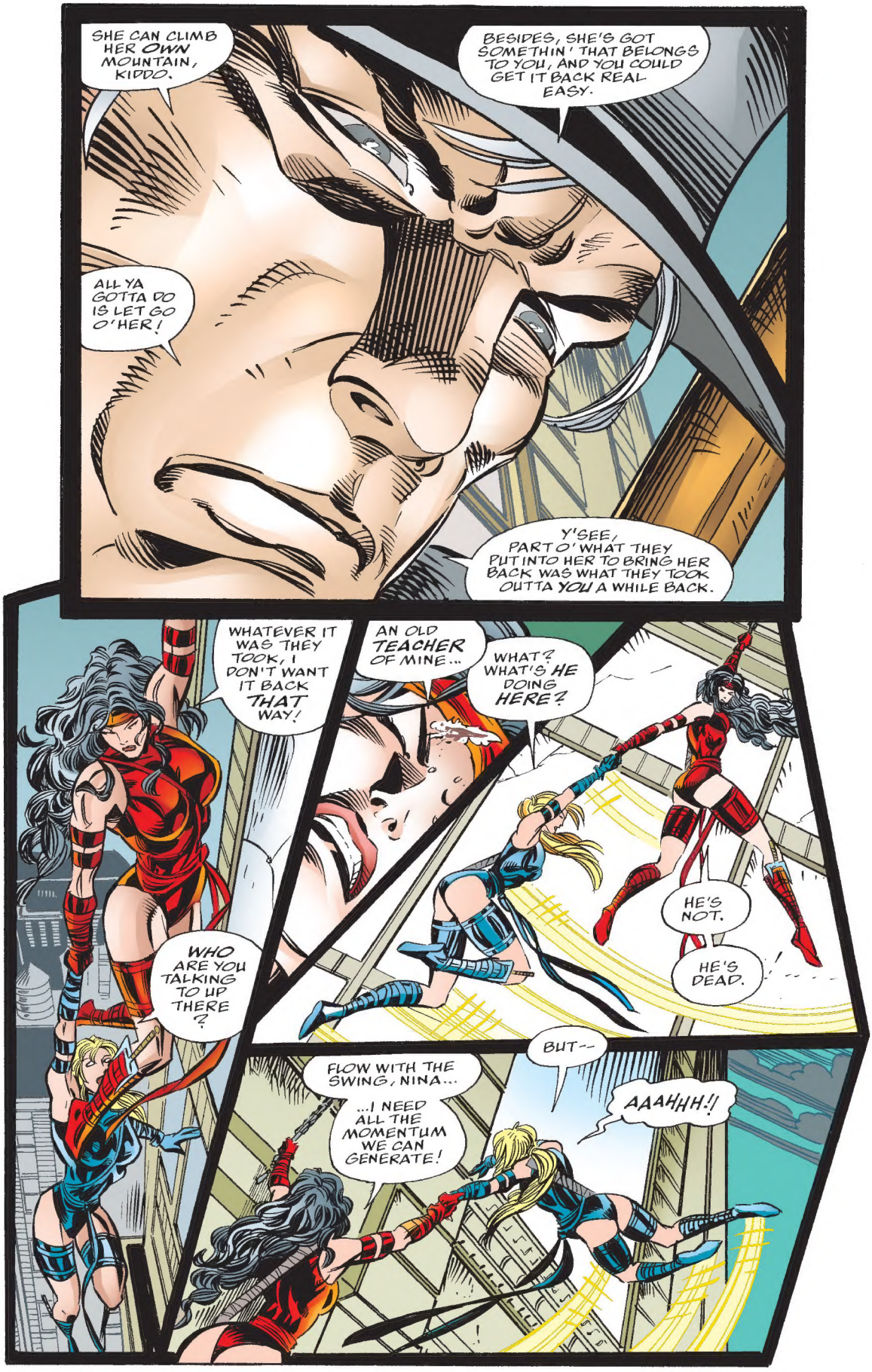
I LEARN FROM MY MISTAKES!
I DON'T REPEAT A FAILED TACTIC OR DEFENSE!
AND I NEVER REPEAT A STRATAGEM OR OFFENSE AGAINST THE SAME OPPONENT!
SO, YOU SEE, LESSONS OF THE PAST HAVE NO BEARING ON THE WHOLLY NEW TECHNIQUES I EMPLOY TODAY!
YOU NEVER DID HAVE A CHANCE OF DEFEATING ME.
WHUD

WHAT HAVE I DONE?
HOW COULD I HAVE COMMITTED ALL OF THOSE MURDERS?
HOW COULD I TRY TO KILL ELEKTRA?
SUPER-NUMERARIES SHOULD NEVER ASK QUESTIONS...
...THEY SHOULD SIMPLY DO THEIR BUSINESS AND EXIT UNOBTRUSIVELY THROUGH THE WINGS...
ELEKTRA, ON THE OTHER HAND, BEING A PRINCIPAL PLAYER, MUST STRUT AND FRET UPON THE STAGE...
...BEFORE SHE MAKES HER GRAND DEPARTURE, AB PROSCENIUM! *
*FROM THE AREA OF THE STAGE BETWEEN THE CURTAIN AND THE ORCHESTRA, THAT IS TO SAY, RIGHT INTO THE AUDIENCE.

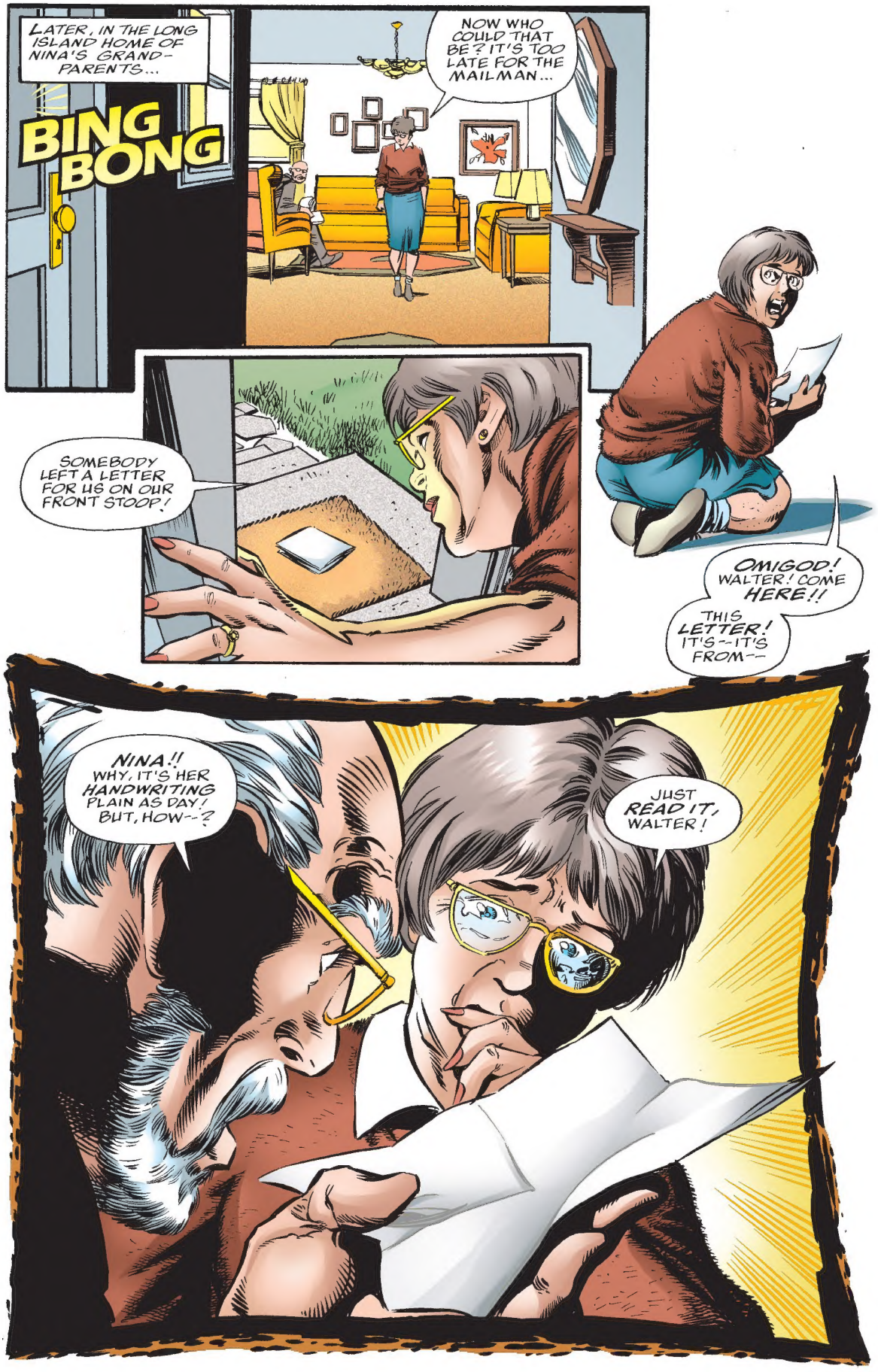
NOOOO!!
I WON'T LET YOU DO TO ELEKTRA WHAT YOU DID TO ME!
YOU FOOL...!
THOOM
...YOU'VE SENT US BOTH TO OUR DOOMS!
I'M SORRY, ELEKTRA!
FORGIVE ME, IF YOU CAN--!
I CAN DO MORE THAN THAT, NINA...!
THUPP

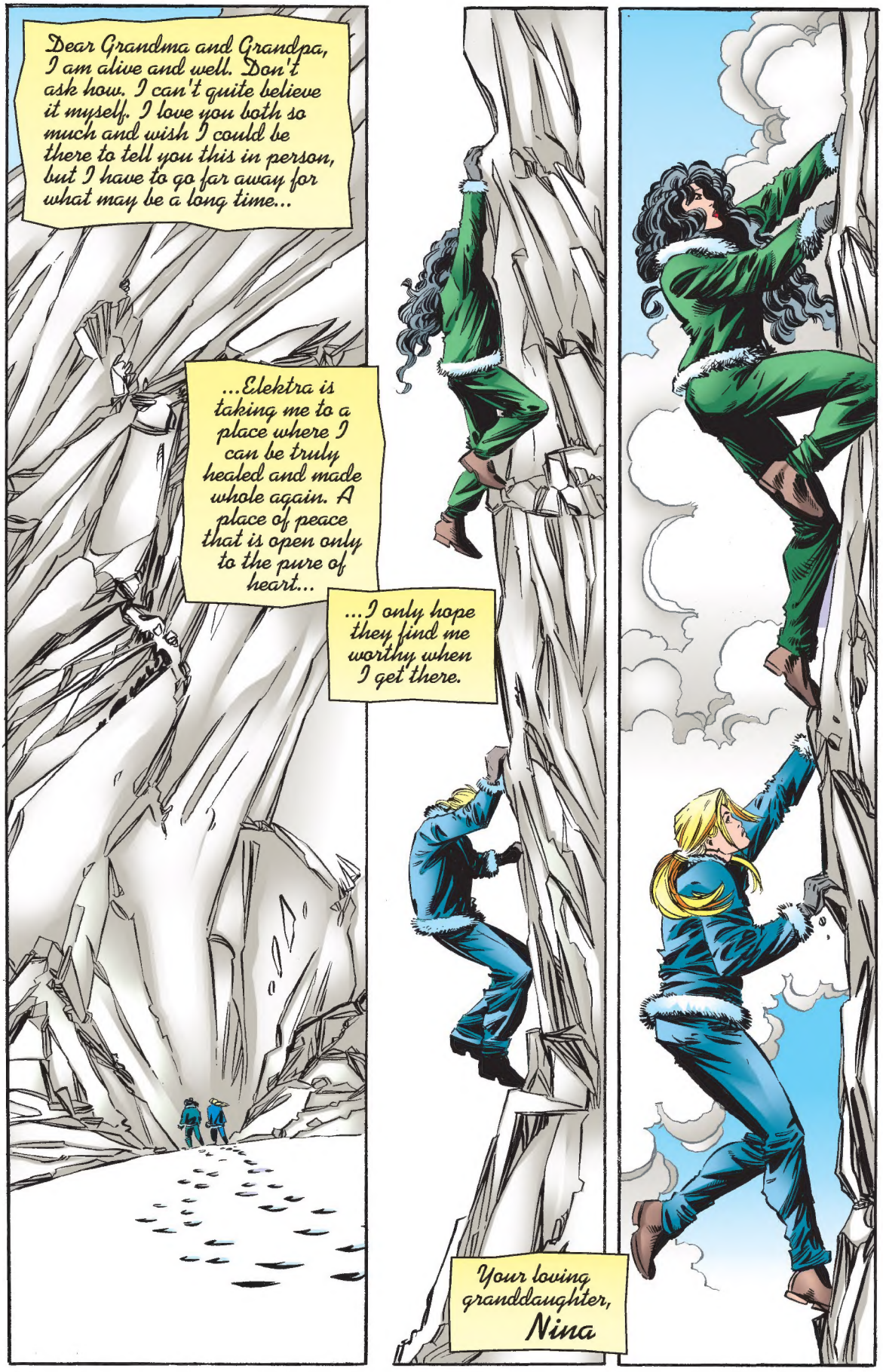
...BUT WHETHER OR NOT I AM SIMPLY DELAYING THE INEVITABLE REMAINS TO BE SEEN!
I USED KUROYAMA'S OWN SICKLE AND CHAIN...
...BUT I DIDN'T HAVE ENOUGH TIME TO MAKE SURE THAT IT WAS SECURELY PLANTED!
ELEKTRA! HOW DID YOU--?!
OH, NINA-- MY GRIP IS SLIPPING...
...AND I DON'T HAVE THE STRENGTH TO LIFT OUR COMBINED WEIGHTS UP TO SAFETY!

I'M SORRY, NINA...
...I'M AFRAID I'VE FAILED YOU YET AGAIN...
I CAN'T DO IT!
SURE YA CAN, KIDDO!
YA CLIMBED THE MOUNTAIN, DIDN'T YA?
STICK!
I DON'T SUPPOSE YOU COULD REACH DOWN AND GIVE US A HAND?
NO WAY!
WOULDN'T BE FAIR!
YA GOTTA GO BY THE RULES, KIDDO!
I'M NOT ASKING FOR MYSELF.
I'M ASKING FOR NINA.
AT LEAST SAVE HER!


SHE CAN CLIMB HER OWN MOUNTAIN, KIDDO.
BESIDES, SHE'S GOT SOMETHIN' THAT BELONGS TO YOU, AND YOU COULD GET IT BACK REAL EASY.
ALL YA GOTTA DO IS LET GO O'HER!
Y'SEE, PART O' WHAT THEY PUT INTO HER TO BRING HER BACK WAS WHAT THEY TOOK OUTTA YOU A WHILE BACK.
WHATEVER IT WAS THEY TOOK, I DON'T WANT IT BACK THAT WAY!
AN OLD TEACHER OF MINE...
WHAT? WHAT'S HE DOING HERE?
WHO ARE YOU TALKING TO UP THERE?
HE'S NOT.
HE'S DEAD.
BUT--
FLOW WITH THE SWING, NINA...
...I NEED ALL THE MOMENTUM WE CAN GENERATE!
AAAHHH!!

HAVE A GOOD LIFE, NINA...
I'LL DO MORE THAN THAT, ELEKTRA!
THUPP
I THINK IT'S TIME WE TOOK A TRIP TOGETHER, NINA...
...REMEMBER...
...ME!
...JUST BE SURE TO PACK SOMETHING WARM.


LATER, IN THE LONG ISLAND HOME OF NINA'S GRAND-PARENTS...
BING BONG
NOW WHO COULD THAT BE? IT'S TOO LATE FOR THE MAILMAN...
SOMEBODY LEFT A LETTER FOR US ON OUR FRONT STOOP!
OMIGOD! WALTER! COME HERE!!
THIS LETTER! IT'S--IT'S FROM--
NINA!! WHY, IT'S HER HANDWRITING PLAIN AS DAY! BUT, HOW--?
JUST READ IT, WALTER!


Dear Grandma and Grandpa, I am alive and well. Don't ask how. I can't quite believe it myself. I love you both so much and wish I could be there to tell you this in person, but I have to go far away for what may be a long time...
...Elektra is taking me to a place where I can be truly healed and made whole again. A place of peace that is open only to the pure of heart...
...I only hope they find me worthy when I get there.
Your loving granddaughter, Nina